

# The Pains of Gambling

Neither of my parents gambled. Games of chance, nonetheless, found a permanent place in our house. Many years would pass before my Catholic education cured me of gambling.

Card games provided the principal means of family entertainment. Crazy Eights and Go Fish initiated myself and all my siblings. Poker quickly followed, playing for plastic chips with each color having a different value. The entire family played at the dining room table and my parents played with me as I lay in bed recovering from a childhood illness. As I grew older, friends would come to play on the back porch. The stakes were always chips, money being reserved for special things like baseball cards and bubble gum.

The real gambling occurred at the church lawn fetes. Our parish occupied an entire city block, excepting three houses hugging one corner. That block contained the rectory, the church, the convent, the grade school and the high school. The church, convent and grade school framed the school yard and that housed the summer lawn fete in June. Ignoring the booths offering crafts and can goods, I went straight to the Over and Under booth. An hour glass shaped cage held two dice. A simple twist rolled the dice from one end of the cage to the other. Under seven and

over seven payed even money; seven payed 3 to 1. It cost a quarter to play and, with \$2.50 in my pocket, I could play for an hour before losing all my quarters.

When my quarters disappeared, I went over to the Big Wheel, a large vertical roulette wheel. Bets cost a dollar or more, far beyond my meager means. When my grandfather visited, he played the Big Wheel and often left with winnings. I stayed with Over and Under and never seemed to have his luck.

The fall lawn fete took place in the high school gym. The food and craft booths reappeared, but the Big Wheel and Over and Under claimed my attention, the latter giving me an hour to lose all my quarters. Every summer and every fall, the result was always the same - I left without my quarters.

It took nearly five years to realize that every time I gambled, I lost all my money - a valuable lesson from my Catholic education. To this day I cannot look at a gambling table without wondering how much I can afford to lose. Not wanting to lose, I quickly turn away.